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BE A SMART SHOPPER ABOUT CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
THE TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
College Station, Texas

BE A SMART SHOPPER ABOUT CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

Extension Family Resource Management Specialists
Texas A&M University

Have you ever had a valid consumer problem? A product or service didn't live up to its claims? Or a merchant didn't sell what he advertised?

You have a right to help when you get stuck with faulty merchandise. Ask yourself a few questions before making a final judgement. The blame could fall on the manufacturer, the store or you.

- Did you follow use and care instructions carefully?
- Was the product used for its intended purpose?
- Did you have reasonable expectations for the product's performance?

Use the following steps to seek help when the blame falls on either the manufacturer or the merchant.

Solve the Problem Locally

Go to the store where you made the purchase. Ask to see manager or supervisor. Try to avoid visiting the store during rush hours or just before closing time.

- Take the sales slip, product, tags, label and instructions with you.
- Stay calm and state the facts.
- Use courtesy in making a complaint.

When the complaint concerns faulty merchandise or service, expect the store to either refund your money or exchange or repair the item.

Write the Company or Manufacturer

Write the company or manufacturer when the complaint cannot be handled locally. Look for the company address on the tag, label or booklet which comes with the product. The local merchant may also know the address. Remember the following guides when writing a company.

- Write a legible and business-like letter, using a typewriter if possible. Keep a carbon copy. Include your name, address and phone number in the letter.
- Identify the product purchased by brand name, model number, size, color and other relevant information.
- Explain the problem as precisely as possible. Include information concerning purchase date, price and previous steps in seeking help.

- Suggest the particular corrective action you would like from the company. This may include refunding money or replacing or repairing the product.

- When returning a product, mail it in the original box. Send the letter with the package if the product is small. By using certified mail, you can specify a return receipt so you'll know if the letter was received.

- Send a second letter if you do not hear from the company within a month.

Consult a Consumer Protection Agency

Consult a consumer protection agency or organization if you fail to get help from the company. Ask the county Extension agents for the name and address of the consumer action panel for automobile, appliance and furniture problems. Check your public library for a copy of the Consumer Action Guide that lists the addresses of major manufacturers' consumer complaint departments. The following are other agencies providing consumer protection.

Local and Business Help

Call the Better Business Bureau for information on the history and business practices of a particular firm. This helps you judge the honesty and reliability of a merchant. Also report complaints about businesses to the local Better Business Bureau.

For individual disputes between buyers and sellers involving small amounts of money, the cheated individual has a right to sue in a Small Claims Court, or Justice Court without the help of a lawyer. Contact the Justice of the Peace located in every county.

Texas Agencies and Organizations

Report any type of fraud and deception in Texas (except that related to insurance or dealing with problems which cross state line) to:

Attorney General's Office
Consumer Protection Division
P. O. Box 12548
Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78711

(complaints must be written on their forms)

Send questions or complaints concerning credit contracts, finance charges, deceptive trade practices and false advertising to:

Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner
P. O. Box 2107
Austin, Texas 78767

For redress advice and referral information contact:

Texas Consumer Association
302 W 15th Street, Suite 202
Austin, TX 77701 512/477-1882

For questions on all types of insurance:

State Board of Insurance
State Insurance Building
1100 San Jacinto
Austin, TX 78786

Federal Agencies and Organizations

Report misleading or deceptive advertising, packaging and selling in interstate commerce to:

Federal Trade Commission
Dallas Regional Office
2001 Bryan
Dallas, Texas 75201

Direct inquiries about misbranded, contaminated or hazardous foods, drugs, cosmetics and medical devices or products to:

Attention: Consumer Specialist
Department of Health & Human Services
Food and Drug Administration District Office
3032 Bryan
Dallas, TX 75201

When the company involved gives no help or you are uncertain who to ask for help, send complaints about all types of consumer problems to:

Office of Consumer Affairs
Department of Health & Human Services
621 Reporters Building
Washington, D.C. 20201

Report mail order problems to:

Direct Mail/Marketing Association, Inc.
Consumer Relations Department
6 E 43rd Street
New York, N.Y. 10017

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